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## ABSTRACT

An evaluation was done of a precollege intervention program that aimed at introducing ninth graders to the idea of going to college, and to challenge them to think about and make a commitment to attending college. The program brought 450 mostly Black and Hispanic ninth graders from an inner-city school district to visit a mid-sized rural university where they met with university administrators, faculty and students and participated in seminars on issues facing adolescents and on attending college. A further program component provided monetary rewards to students for passing grades in school. Those funds were then deposited into an scholarship account for later use at any institution of higher education. A summative evaluation using a Likert type scale was conducted on all participants after the campus visit. A short structured interview on program satisfaction was also conducted with a randomly selected group. The results showed that 97 percent of participants were interested in attending college, and that 96 percent thought that college attendance would create more opportunities in life. Also, the seminars at the college received high ratings with the overall program's ability to answer questions about college receiving a 96 percent positive rating. Included are two figures, a table and eight references. (JB)

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THINKING ABOUT COLLEGE: A FIRST STEP IN EARLY INTERVENTION

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## **THINKING ABOUT COLLEGE: A FIRST STEP IN EARLY INTERVENTION**

**Samuel Hinton**

The author summarizes , evaluates, and discusses a precollege program jointly offered by a midwest university, an urban school district, and business .

Early awareness college programs focusing on at-risk groups are fulfilling important functions of introducing high school freshmen and junior high school seniors to the idea of going to college, and to challenge them to think about, or even to make a commitment to attending college; Nation At Risk (1983), Symposium on Early Awareness of Post Secondary Education(1989). Different models sprouting around the country take into consideration the unique characteristics and needs of the clientele, but the intentions are similar thereby making sharing relevant to the research effort. This paper reviews, evaluates and summarizes an early intervention model. The results are presented for the benefit of program coordinators, in the hope that they may become useful in the future as reference material.

### **Participants**

#### **Group composition**

The participants are four hundred and fifty ninth graders from an inner-city school district hosted by a mid-sized (twenty- seven thousand) rural university some thirty miles away. The students were selected by their teachers and guidance counselors from twelve different schools. The students were predominantly African-American (over eighty percent), with Hispanic students forming the second largest number (about ten percent). There was a very small group of native Americans, and a small group referred to as "other". This early intervention program focused on students who had been identified as being at- risk of not completing high school, whose minds were not set on attending college .

## THE PARTNERSHIP

### School, university, parents, and business.

The program has the support and commitment of the top university administrators as well as that of the superintendent of schools of the public school system, and the chamber of commerce of the school district. A scholarship in escrow program is funded by area businesses and provides pecuniary rewards to students in all high schools for passing grades. A student received \$40.00 for an "A", \$20.00 for a "B", and \$10.00 for a "C", if these grades were earned in college preparatory classes. The accumulated amount would be paid directly into a scholarship account in any institution of higher education the student chose after graduating from high school. The university funds, coordinates and implements the program in consultation and cooperation with the public school administration and staff. Parents were required to sign permission slips for their children to participate. A conceptual model of the program is presented in Figure 1.

Insert Fig. 1

## PROGRAM CONTENT

### Content description

The total capacity per day for this fourteen week program was thirty. During the visit the ninth graders attended a college awareness seminar, visited classes and residence halls, and had lunch with faculty, student affairs staff, and university students. The educational awareness seminar (Hinton, 1989), was titled "Chancers and Choosers" and included items dealing with self esteem, chemical dependency, teen pregnancy, the importance of taking college preparatory courses, and a review of majors and programs offered at a college or university. An innovative feature of the seminar is that the students arrived at decisions about each topic through

discussion and consensus with their peers. They were presented with both negative and positive alternatives, and were allowed to individually choose a position. After some debate and discussion by the group, the "facilitator" a faculty member or student affairs professional presented some facts, figures, or scenarios relevant to the topic and then asked the group to problem solve. This was a good way of using the peer group consensus in case-study type situations. The students received a certificate of completion after the seminar, and also signed a "striving for excellence" contract, a kind of self promise that they would work hard, stay in school, and aspire to getting a college education; (Riley, 1989).

Another segment of the program involved having lunch with faculty, staff, and student role models in college. The formal lunch allowed for a panel of faculty, staff, and university students to share personal experiences about growing up, and dealing with obstacles. This activity also provided an opportunity for the students to realize that the road to success could be paved with frustrations and challenges but that these could be overcome through persistence and determination. A question and answer segment allowed interaction and sharing between panelists and audience and provided relevance to the meaning of success in higher education. After lunch the children were divided into groups and sent to observe classes in session, visit laboratories, theatres, museums, art galleries, and gymnasiums on campus. The last part of the program allowed the children to tour the campus under the care of a university student. This tour was individualized, and the tour guides specially trained to help make the campus come alive to the ninth graders. They visited residence halls and observed how college students behaved in their living environment. Over one hundred student services professionals, senior administrators, university students, and faculty participated as hosts. Intensive training and workshops were conducted by the program coordinator ranging from one to two hours. A diagram of program content is presented in Figure 2.

Insert Fig. 2

## METHODOLOGY

### Survey instruments

A summative evaluation using a likert type scale was conducted. The survey items asked some general questions pertaining to college such as - "are you interested in attending college?" "Do you think that it is important to take college preparation courses?" "Is the college experience for everyone?" "Do people who attend college get more opportunities in life?" Other questions related to program content such as "was the educational awareness seminar beneficial?" "Was the faculty-student panel helpful?" "Was the experience of visiting a college class in session beneficial?" "Did you have most of your questions about college answered during this visit?" A short structured interview about program satisfaction was also randomly administered, and the results summarized in the narrative.

### Design and Analysis

Frequencies of yes, no, don't know responses were analyzed and the results compiled in Table 1. Structured interviews to randomly selected groups of student and teacher participants were also conducted, and notes taken on the given responses. On general questions pertaining to college, ninety-seven percent of the participants indicated that they were interested in attending college, and ninety-four percent believed that taking college preparation courses was important. Ninety-six percent thought that more opportunities in life could be created for those who have attended college, but only fifty percent believed that the college experience was for everyone. The ratings on specific items of the program were also generally high. The college awareness seminar received eighty-two percent approval, the faculty-student panel ninety-four percent, the classroom visit eighty-seven percent, and the overall impact of the

program in answering questions about college received a ninety-six percent positive rating. On the question "Is college for everyone?" only fifty-one percent responded in the affirmative. On that same question twenty-eight percent thought that college was not for everyone, and twenty-one percent did not know the answer. In the structured interviews asking questions relating to student satisfaction concerning the program, over ninety percent of the participants were satisfied and indicated that they gained a lot by attending. All of the participating teachers (26), praised the program, and felt that it was helpful to the motivation of students.

|                 |
|-----------------|
| Insert Table 1. |
|-----------------|

Some questions asked by students participating in the program were : " Why are some students sitting in the lounge?" "What time does the bell ring for change of classes?" " What is a G.P.A. ?" "What is an elective?" "Are all professors really strict?" "What happens if a student does not attend class regularly?" "Do I have to be very smart to come to college?" "What does an Orthodontist do?" "Do I have to be rich to attend college"? These questions were taken seriously by program staff, because they indicate some of the misconceptions and barriers that affect students attitudes towards pursuing higher education. The students left with names and telephone numbers of faculty, professional staff, and college students they can call if they have further questions. Some of the comments made by teachers were - "Thank you for inviting us to come"; "I am so glad that they are hearing this from other people"; "They seem to be listening to what the college students in the panel were saying"; "thank you for thinking about such a program"; "I believe that this visit will help them change for the better".

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The significance of precollege programs catering to high school freshmen and juniors was addressed from an equal educational opportunity standpoint, as well as from a national welfare perspective. A conceptualization of a partnership model was provided, and the need for cooperative interventions by schools, higher educational institutions, industry, and parents advocated. Although programs tend to address the unique needs of children in different parts of the country, more could be gained by sharing successes and difficulties with educators and practitioner's. Educators and program coordinators who wish to develop new programs may find the above model and its application useful as reference material.

## References

- A Nation At Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform (1983). National Commission on Excellence For Educational Reform. U. S. Department of Education. Washington, D. C.
- Certainty of Opportunity: A Report on the NASFAA/ACE Symposium on Early Awareness Of Post Secondary Education (1989). National Association of Student Aid Administrators and American Council on Education.
- Hinton, S. (1989). Early Intervention Program: Cleveland, Ohio Visitation For Ninth Graders Report. Department of Admissions, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Early Intervention Seminar: A Guide For Presenters. Fall, (1989). Department of Admissions, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio.
- Riley, J. S. (1989) On the Road to College: Paving the Way. College Board Review, No. 153, 20-25.
- The Scholarships and Escrow program has been criticized as "paying children to stay in school". Some public school districts around the nation however see it as a way of motivating disadvantaged children to aspire to a college education.
- The Aetna Foundation has funded College Board sponsored early intervention projects in Dallas, Fort Worth, Lowell, Massachusetts, Trenton, New Jersey, Savannah/Chatham, Georgia, Indianapolis, Indiana, and San Jose Unified and East side school districts in California.
- The Bridge program of the University of Wisconsin St. Louis, is an advanced model that incorporates programs ranging from one day visits, to taking college credits in the school campus taught by teachers with advanced degrees.

# APPENDIX A

Figure 1.

## Partnership Model for PreCollege Programs\*

| BUSINESS                                                               | SCHOOL                                                  | COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY                                                       | PARENT                                                                  | STUDENT                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1. Provide Funds.                                                      | Train teachers to be culturally sensitive.              | Take initiative. Invite school to participate regularly.                 | Be involved . Visit school                                              | Be willing to dare Strive for excellence |
| 2. Recruit, and train persons from at-risk groups.                     | Train Counselors to treat all children fairly.          | Establish top Administration Support.                                    | Talk to Guidance Counselors.                                            | Show interest in college Programs .      |
| 3. Help advertise succesful programs .                                 | Select students who will benefit from program .         | Commit adequate funds.                                                   | motivate child to regularly attend school .                             | Be curious ask questions .               |
| 4. Participate in programs using own personnel .                       | Supervise and organize Students .                       | Select and train program personnel Involve faculty, staff ,and students. | Show your child that you are interested.                                | Feel good about yourself.                |
| 5. Allow at risk children some experiential exposure to world of work. | Monitor students attitudes, progress Share information. | Develop and implement program Evaluate Disseminate results.              | Do not procrastinate about your child's future. Plan early for College. | Promise yourself that you will succeed.  |

# APPENDIX B

Table 1  
Responses To Survey Questions (n=480)

| Item                                   | Yes | No  | Dont Know |
|----------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| Interest in attending college          | 97  | 0.5 | 2         |
| College prep courses important         | 94  | 3   | 3         |
| College is for everyone                | 51  | 28  | 21        |
| Awareness seminar beneficial           | 82  | 6   | 11        |
| Faculty -Student panel helpful         | 94  | 3   | 3         |
| Classroom visit beneficial             | 87  | 5   | 5         |
| College visit answered questions       | 91  | 5   | 3         |
| Attend college, get more opportunities | 96  | 2   | 2         |

## APPENDIX C

Figure 2.

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### Agenda

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|             |                                        |
|-------------|----------------------------------------|
| 8:30 a.m.   | Participants depart from school campus |
| 9:45 a.m.   | Arrival at university campus           |
| 10:00 a. m. | Welcome and overview                   |
| 10:15 a.m.  | College awareness seminar              |
| 11:15 a.m.  | Break                                  |
| 11:30 a.m.  | Faculty -student panel and Luncheon    |
| 12:30 p.m.  | Campus exploration                     |
| 1:30 p.m.   | Classroom visit                        |
| 2:25 p.m.   | Prepare to depart                      |

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